DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 454 576 EA 030 980

AUTHOR	Kinder, Jack A.
TITLE	A Short Guide to School Public Relations. Fastback 464.
INSTITUTION	Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, Bloomington, IN.
ISBN	ISBN-0-87367-664-5
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	47p.; Published each fall and spring.
AVAILABLE FROM	Phi Delta Kappa International, 408 North Union, P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. Tel: 800-766-1156 (Toll Free); Tel: 812-339-1156; Web site: http://www.pdkintl.org.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Mass Media; *Organizational Communication; Policy Formation; *Politics of Education; *Public Relations; Public Support; School Community Relationship

ABSTRACT

This fastback document summarizes ways that schools can establish and maintain a sound public-relations program. It states that public relations should be on an equal footing with all other school functions, especially since public schools are facing increasing competition from nonpublic schools. When developing a public-relations plan, an effective school public-relations program must derive its impetus from the school board; board members' participation is crucial to success, and board members, along with all other stakeholders, should be included in the development of a public-relations master plan. The master plan must consider the various media and their roles in public-relations efforts. Administrators should begin by looking at the school district's materials and how they are perceived by the public before focusing on the public media and their purpose in society. Administrators must also be prepared to work with parents and foster two-way communication, such as that offered by parent-teacher conferences. School officials must also be aware of the value of public relations during budget considerations. The text offers some examples of successful public-relations efforts in California, Georgia, and Florida. (Contains 29 resources that offer further information.) (RJM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

EA

464 FASTBACK

ED 454 576

A Short Guide to School Public Relations

Jack A. Kinder

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

D. R. Walling

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

EA 030 180

PHI DELTA KAPPA EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

2 BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Jack A. Kinder

Jack A. Kinder has served as a middle school and high school science teacher, an elementary principal, a school superintendent, an association executive, a state department administrator, and a university professor. Kinder holds a bachelor's degree from Maryville State Teachers College and master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Missouri.

Kinder has received distinguished service awards from both undergraduate and graduate institutions. He has been a board member of the Education Commission of the States and has served through presidential appointments on the Fulbright and Continuing Education Council. Kinder also is the author of fastback 182 *School Public Relations: Communicating to the Community*, published in 1982.

The author dedicates this fastback to his wife, Laura, and his children, Paul, Cynthia, Sara, and Jamie.

Series Editor, Donovan R. Walling

A Short Guide to School Public Relations

by
Jack A. Kinder

ISBN 0-87367-664-5
Copyright © 2000 by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation
Bloomington, Indiana

Table of Contents

Introduction 7

Start-Up Strategies 10
- The Role of the School Board 10
- The Master Plan 12

The Media 16
- School District Media 16
- Public Media 17
- The News Release 20

Working with Parents 22
- Two-Way Communication 23
- Parent-Teacher Conferences 25
- Parent-Teacher Organizations 26

P.R. at the Polls 27
- A Look at Community Groups 29

Success Stories 32
- Modesto, California 32
- Atlanta, Georgia 33
- Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 35
- Vancouver, Washington 37
- Rowland Heights, California 38

Resources 41

Introduction

Public relations should be put on an equal footing with all other school functions. Until this is accepted, individuals charged with school leadership will find it difficult to realize important school improvement goals. Unfortunately, in the press of dealing with day-to-day issues, busy administrators and teachers often fail to recognize how vitally important it is to the health of their schools and districts to maintain a comprehensive public relations program.

Schools across the nation are reeling from the tremendous upheaval in our society. Public schools no longer can claim a monopoly on education. Private and parochial school systems compete for students at all levels. Many states are considering proposals for tuition tax credits. Charter schools are springing up all over the nation. Education is on the national agenda and likely to remain there for the foreseeable future.

A variety of pressures, including the changing demographics of the school-age population, has made it more difficult, but also more imperative, for school people to do a better job communicating with their constituencies. As late as the 1960s more than half of all U.S. households had children in school. Children were a natural conduit

for information between school and home. Today fewer than a quarter of all households have children in school.

Good public relations programs promote honesty and openness. Sometimes the results can be unpredictable. When school leaders reveal weaknesses as well as strengths, they can open themselves and their programs to criticism. But the vast majority of the public, when they know the facts, are supportive of the efforts of their school leaders. And much of any communications effort must be telling the public about what is right in schools to counter the negative view so often taken by the media. Communicating with the public about the schools they support is truly an obligation. And effective school public relations should be viewed as an important commitment to the public trust.

Part of an effective school public relations program is the realization that the school public is changing constantly. Mobility is a key factor. New students and new teachers are the rule, not the exception. Thus some portion of the school public always is uninformed — and needs to be informed if they are to be counted on for support. Effective school public relations must be ongoing. One-shot, hit-and-run P.R. efforts simply will not work in the long term.

The schools are an integral part of the community. Day-to-day school activities are part of the fabric of community life. Therefore the message of school public relations is one of people, not places; of individuals and activities, not bricks and mortar.

One of the ways that school public relations puts on a human face is through polling. Business people and

politicians increasingly use sophisticated polling strategies to find out what their buyers and constituents are thinking. This type of work now must be done to inform school public relations efforts.

The purpose of this fastback is to provide a short guide to establishing and maintaining a sound school public relations program. I describe proven techniques that are used by many schools to communicate positively with their communities.

Start-Up Strategies

Let's begin with goals. The goals identified for a school public relations program set the tone for the program as well as establish the basic "to do" list. It takes time — and it should — to set worthy goals and plan how they will be accomplished. The goals begin with questions: What should the public relations program do? How should it be accomplished? And how will we know if it is achieved?

These questions should be answered in fairly specific terms with the following components: a concrete goal statement, strategies for reaching the goal, and a method for assessing whether (or how well) the goal has been met. The section titled "Success Stories" later in this fastback shows this process in action.

The Role of the School Board

An effective school public relations program must derive its impetus from the school board. Boards make the major policy decisions, employ staff, approve programs, and determine budgets. Sadly, most school public relations efforts do not sufficiently involve the board of education. When the public relations effort is

primarily an administrative one, much real thrust is lost. School board members are, after all, direct representatives of the school public. As such, their participation in the school public relations effort is crucial to success.

The school board needs to give the public relations effort as much attention as they give, say, school finance. Every school board meeting is an opportunity to communicate with the public about important school matters. That is effective P.R.

The school board also is key to obtaining input from a school district's constituents. This is an important part of setting goals. What are parents and community members concerned about? Politicians — keep in mind that most school board members are elected — base their campaigns and their programs on polls and other opinion-sampling strategies, so that what they do reflects the needs and interests of those they serve. School board members should do no less. Unfortunately, too often school boards (and their employees) are "blindsided" by criticism or controversy because they have not taken time to obtain broad input from the public.

Another facet of school board involvement is to remember the "public within" — that is, the staff of the schools. What needs and interests are expressed by this internal public, and how should the school district respond? Effective school public relations programs also help to shape staff attitudes, particularly the attitude of responsiveness to the school's external publics. Attending to this aspect also helps to ensure that all staff are partners in communicating positively and effectively with the community.

The Master Plan

The development of a cohesive, well-articulated, and well-founded set of goals is the first step in building a master plan for school public relations. Piecemeal, hit-or-miss P.R. will result unless some effort is taken to plan well. And that plan must involve everyone, from the school board president to the office secretary. No one — not superintendent, not principal, not teacher, not custodian — can be allowed to "opt out," because every school employee is part of and in touch with the public outside the school. If a secretary is rude to a caller, if a bus driver verbally abuses a child, if a teacher runs down the schools to her colleagues at a local bridge party — all are sending a negative P.R. message.

It follows, then, that everyone also has a stake in developing the master P.R. plan. Thus to develop and to carry out the master plan there must be a representative P.R. committee. This committee should receive its charge from the school board, but then the committee must act as the school board's functionary, later involving board members individually or collectively as needed.

The P.R. Committee. The public relations committee is the heart of the P.R. activity. This committee, functioning at the district level, should be broadly respresentative of the community and the staff. A committee of about 12 individuals is ideal; however, committees up to 25 can still function efficiently. Ideally, the superintendent will chair this committee and, if a school board member is not active on the committee, can serve as the board's direct representative. Committee members may be volunteers, or they may be elected or appointed.

The committee collectively serves as motivator, coordinator, and reporter with regard to all public relations work. In its role as coordinator, it may, in fact, help to systematize the work of school-level P.R. committees.

Opinion Polling. One activity of the P.R. committee will be gathering input from the district's internal and external publics. Often such information gathering can be done through the use of opinion surveys. In fact, a first effort of a newly formed P.R. committee probably should be a fairly comprehensive public opinion survey whose results can be used to establish concrete goals for the P.R. effort. Annual repeats of such a poll also are a good idea as a means of fine-tuning the P.R. program.

Some published polling materials are available for P.R. committees to use or adapt. For example, Phi Delta Kappa International publishes a program titled *PACE: Polling Attitudes of Community on Education* to assist school districts interested in ascertaining the needs and interests of their communities. The PACE materials include a reservoir of more than 700 pretested questions, as used in the PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Towards the Public Schools from 1969 to 1998. These questions can be adapted for local polls. Extensive guidelines and procedures are included.

Later, as part of the public relations committee's ongoing work, smaller surveys can be used to tap public concern over specific issues, such as a new curriculum. And not all information gathering needs to be in written form. Telephone surveys are effective. So is declaring a two-week "listening period" during which staff make

note of all communications from the public — telephone calls, notes to teachers, letters, etc. — on a given issue or set of issues.

Staff Workshops. Getting all staff "on board" with the P.R. effort will take some start-up work. Thus another initial task for the P.R. committee will be to develop and conduct staff workshops aimed at helping everyone realize that good public relations depends not on an individual or a committee but on everyone doing his or her part.

An effective initial staff workshop might begin with a discussion of the responses to the general opinion poll and where those have led in terms of designing the P.R. effort's goals and strategies. Staff workshops held in individual schools are a good way to launch site-based P.R. committees, too.

At last, after wide-scale involvement, opinion polling, and site-based committee formation, there comes a point when the master plan needs to be set down in writing. I would suggest that it is reasonable for the master plan to be divided into three component programs: those that will enhance communication districtwide, those that can be set in motion at the school building level, and those that require individual initiative. Dividing into system, building, and individual components will help make the overall effort more manageable.

It should be kept in mind that the time to launch a P.R. effort is not during a crisis. Many school administrators naively believe that public relations is there to "bail them out" of tough situations. A well-designed P.R. program should aim to prevent problems, not solve them. The ef-

fective public relations program gives a district a viable alternative to so-called crisis management by building communication bridges between the schools and their publics that can short-circuit potential problems.

The Media

The facets of "The Media" conjured up by most people include print, radio, and television. But when discussing school public relations, it is a good idea to think in terms of district media and public media.

School District Media

All school districts produce print media: community newspapers, school newsletters, reports (school finances, building needs), curriculum guides, and so on. Some print materials are highly specific and limited (lunch menus, bus schedules), while others are broader or have intellectual content (community program guides). While the P.R. committee cannot be directly responsible for such media, they can provide basic guidelines and assistance, so that all print material effectively represents the school district, whether issued by the central office or by individual schools.

Many school districts also have radio stations, and some have television stations. Although these facilities are designed primarily to educate students about these media, they should not be discounted as vehicles to communicate with the public. Many, in fact, also have a public education mission.

Public Media

If one asks members of the media what the main purpose of the various public media is, invariably they will respond, "to serve the community." While this also is how school people see the role of the media, the two viewpoints often come into conflict over interpretation of what best serves the community. Unfortunately, a skeptical public often seems to see schools as scapegoats for societal ills, a view that is fed by negative press.

Although the preparation of most teachers and reporters is similar, there is little evidence of shared respect between them in many communities. Years of defensiveness on both sides of the microphone or the notepad have bred mistrust. This mistrust may never be fully removed; however, bridges can be built. For educators, the first step may be the most difficult. That is, to set aside defensiveness in favor of total openness. It means trumpeting school success stories, of course. But it also means not putting the lid on negative news. News media personnel — whether print, audio, or visual -- will come to trust school officials to give them the straight story when that is what happens *all* of the time.

When schools take time to build communication bridges with the public media, the story about a school drug raid that might have been given a banner headline and a negative spin may earn a more balanced treatment, including better research into the schools' successes, not just their failures. More comprehensive communication can also result in greater coverage of school events that show the schools in a positive light.

The decision to be totally open is the first step. Implementing that decision will be the next several steps, which consist of building institutional and personal contacts between school personnel and media representatives. Media representatives need to know whom to contact for information in the school system. And, of course, school personnel need to know whom to contact in the media and how best to convey school news to various media outlets.

Following are some general guidelines that can help develop sound, productive media relations:

- Treat media representatives with professional respect. Most reporters, for example, hold four-year degrees comparable to those of teachers. They deserve the same common courtesies as any professional deserves. Attend to communication matters, such as keeping appointments, returning telephone calls promptly, and so on.
- Be prepared to respond to media questions. In other words, do your homework. Anticipate what will be asked and have information at hand for accurate, specific answers.
- Strike "no comment" from your vocabulary. If you do not feel sufficiently informed to answer a question, say so. And then indicate that you will find the necessary information and follow up with the reporter. "No comment" responses, or avoiding the media altogether, produce negative impressions that can find their way into the media.

- When you make a mistake, admit it. If you provide information that turns out to be wrong, correct it promptly.
- Avoid "educationese." If students are learning more, say "Students are learning more," not "The program effectively meets the educational needs of the children." Gobbledygook does not commuicate well. If technical language must be used, use it sparingly and define it carefully.
- Develop "news sense." Find out the kinds of stories that interest media representatives. Most reporters are interested in attention-catching features, in addition to the routine stories about test scores, awards to the district or individual schools, and school board policy decisions.
- Designate a team of individuals to be responsible for learning how to write effective news releases and ensure that their work is coordinated to avoid redundancies.
- Learn the deadlines under which the various media must operate, and then time phone calls and news releases to meet those deadlines.

As I said, these are basic guidelines that can help educators actualize their desire for increased and more positively slanted coverage of school news. Some other ideas worth considering include:

- Host a media preview at the beginning of the school year. Invite representatives of the public media to an informal reception in order to meet key school district personnel and to be briefed on new policies

and new programs. Be certain to include school media personnel in this event.

- Provide media representatives with contact names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Update this information whenever it changes. An amplification of this suggestion is to structure a district speakers bureau of individuals who are willing and able to represent the district to the media and to community groups.
- Suggest a "teacher feature" as a regular newspaper column or broadcast feature. Be prepared to back up the suggestion with personnel who can provide good information and are willing to be interviewed.

Finally, it is always a good idea to ensure that every building in the district is prepared to be a good host. For example, if a film crew from the local television station is coming to do a feature story, be certain to have greeters on hand and a custodian available to assist in locating power sources, lights, and so on. The easier it is for the media to get a good story, the more likely they will return time and again. And the result will accumulate as an enhanced positive image of the school in the public's eye and a better informed and supportive community.

The News Release

More detailed information about writing news releases can be found in any standard journalism or public relations textbook. Here are a few basic guidelines:

- Use the "inverted pyramid" style of organization, placing the most important information first and working systematically to the least important information. The journalist's 5 W's and H need to be up front: Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How.
- Get the details right. Double-check facts and then provide a contact name and telephone number so that any reporter who has questions can reach the person who has the answers.
- Use standard manuscript form: 8½" x 11" white paper, one side only, double-spaced copy in a standard font. Also, be certain that the copy is free of spelling or grammatical errors.

News releases should be objective and factual. Editorial comment must be reserved for other vehicles. Also, it is a good idea to keep in mind that limited space is likely to be devoted to school news at the best of times. Therefore the news release should be direct and succinct. This holds especially true for the broadcast media, where air time is at a premium.

A useful resource for those charged with developing news releases is *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (Goldstein 1998).

It is important for schools to play fair with all of the community's public media by ensuring that all media outlets get the same information at the same time. And it is essential that news releases be timely. As the saying goes, old news is no news.

Working with Parents

Some special attention needs to be paid to the schools' closest link to the community — the parents of their students.

A great deal of criticism of today's schools focuses on so-called anachronisms. The school year is still guided by a largely outmoded, agrarian calendar that required students to be out of school during the summer in order to help with farming. And the school-day schedule often does not meet the needs of today's families, many of which are "atypical" in configuration and work schedules.

Much of this criticism is valid. There is no such thing as a typical family, the working father / nonworking mother configuration of the traditional family myth. Today's families often are headed by single parents. Blended families and working mothers are commonplace. And latch-key children who routinely come home to an empty dwelling are as often the rule as the exception.

All of this argues for schools to be sensitive and responsive to these factors. A poll by the National Committee

for Citizens in Education revealed that a majority of single parents believe that schools are unresponsive to their needs. They reported concern about such things as having to take time off from work for parent-teacher conferences and the failure of schools to communicate with noncustodial parents. They took issue with children's books that portrayed the traditional family stereotype. And they expressed resentment over educators' use of such terms as "broken home," which negatively portray nonstereotypical family configurations.

The single-parent family or the family of two working parents will likely require child care regularly, often from early morning until early evening. Thus there is a reasonable concern on the part of such parents about who will care for and teach their children and the content and character of that care and instruction. Schools need to be prepared to respond to this concern.

Two-Way Communication

One way to respond is to examine communication strategies to ensure that home-school communication works regardless of the type of family configuration. And that communication should be two-way. Schools need to reach out to parents, but they also need to make it easy for parents to contact the schools.

Face-to-face communication is important, whether it takes place in the school or in the home. When this direct means of communication is unavailable, other means must be used. A handwritten note from a teacher to a parent, and vice versa, can be effective. So can a tele-

phone call, whether it is the teacher who calls the parent or the other way around. The key is to maintain an attitude of openness to communication. Parents need to feel comfortable with the idea that they can contact a school official whenever they need to. And they should not dread a call or a note, because school people make it a point to communicate good news more often than bad news.

That last point is very important. Schools need to communicate positive messages; otherwise they are guilty of exactly what they criticize in the public media: being purveyors of only negative news. One device, for example, is the "Happygram." Teachers can use quick, telegram-like notes to praise a student who does well on a difficult test, learns a new skill, or performs a good deed.

Other communication vehicles include school newsletters and report cards. School newsletters should be carefully composed to include positive news and features, not just facts and calendars. Parents are interested in awards and promotions, but they also want to know about what happens in classrooms, what students are doing on a day-to-day basis. School newspapers can provide that "slice of life" viewpoint.

Report cards also are communication vehicles. As such, they should include more than merely grades. Comments about students' strengths and weaknesses, ideas for improvement, and invitations to dialogue are important components of real communication. Parents should be invited to respond in writing, by a telephone call, or in a parent-teacher conference.

Parent-Teacher Conferences

Traditional parent-teacher conferences can be a source of anxiety for all concerned. They have the potential to be a positive P.R. tool, but too often that potential is unrealized.

Like any effective form of communication, the best parent-teacher conferences are two-way discussions. If the teacher adopts the attitude of telling the parents about their children as the focus of a conference, true communication is diminished. Teachers should listen and learn from parents, allowing the parents to do an equal share of talking.

Preparation on the part of the teacher is essential. Before a conference, the teacher should gather records and papers, jot down specific discussion points, and prepare suggestions. But preparation is also important for parents. Therefore it can be useful to use an issue of the school newsletter to help parents prepare. Let them know that it is a good idea to come to the conference with a list of concerns or questions. And it is important for both teacher and parents to involve students in preparing for conferences and, in some cases, in participating in the conference.

Making it possible for parents who work various schedules to attend parent-teacher conferences is the final step. Flexible conference schedules are essential. Time slots must be available before school, during school, and after school. Many schools provide child care for younger children so that parents can concentrate on the conference.

Parent-Teacher Organizations

Parents today are extremely busy, and so getting them involved in the life of the school can be a challenge. An effective parent-teacher organization can help. Following are a few suggestions:

- Involve the parent-teacher organization in school improvement. Choose a school improvement objective and engage the organization as an active partner — and not just in fundraising.
- Generate interest in the organization by contacting parents and inviting them to stand for election, to head committees, and so on.
- Encourage the parent-teacher organization to widen its scope by participating in broader community events, such as parades, bazaars, and holiday events.
- Enlist the parent-teacher organization in planning school events, such as festivals and assemblies.

Other activities that can involve the parent-teacher organization or individual parents include: setting up a "Welcome Wagon" using teachers (both active and retired), parents, and students as ambassadors to newcomers in the school community, and distributing fact sheets about the local schools or specific school issues throughout the community or to selected segments or neighborhoods.

P.R. at the Polls

Too often school districts come to budget time unprepared to really connect with the public that must finance school programs and buildings. Having district finances in order is merely a first step. The next step is to convince the public that they are in order and that requested funding is appropriate and necessary.

Unfortunately, busy school administrators and school board members have not had easy access to the little research that has been done on conducting successful budget campaigns. However, a kit from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) can be a valuable beginning. NSPRA's "You Can Win at the Polls" is organized into 10 steps for success, based on studies of 50 effective school funding campaigns around the nation.

Most decisions at the polls are made by citizens who do not have — or no longer have — children in the public schools. Thus funding campaigns are not won or lost on the basis of parents' votes. This does not obviate the need to communicate well with parents about the schools' needs. That is necessary. But it is essential for success to communicate school needs to the larger com-

munity of nonparents. Everyone must understand that it is in the community's and the nation's best interests to invest in schools and education.

In the studies reviewed by NSPRA, the most effective funding campaigns were only part of a well-developed, year-round P.R. effort. In some cases funding campaigns were conducted successfully in the absence of a year-round P.R. program, but such an ongoing program usually was established in the aftermath of the successful funding campaign.

Another factor that must be understood is that the outcome of a school funding campaign often can be accurately predicted by the public's attitudes toward the school. Thus prior assessment of community attitudes, using a poll similar to the one I discussed previously, can serve as a predictor of success and therefore can be used to fine-tune a P.R. program well ahead of the crucial period of the funding campaign.

It is a rule of thumb that voters tend to fall into three camps: those with strong negative feelings, those with strong positive feelings, and those on the fence. The fence-sitters are the real target group in any P.R. campaign. The goal is to move them off the fence and into the positive camp.

The NSPRA's 10 steps can be summarized as follows:

1. Develop a strong P.R. program.
2. Plan, study, analyze, and develop a timeline.
3. Study historical data.
4. Survey the community.
5. Develop a campaign strategy.

6. Conduct special voter registration.
7. Develop election materials, the tools and techniques.
8. Identify the "yes" vote and the plurality needed to win.
9. Carry out the election-day activities.
10. Debrief and evaluate.

A Look at Community Groups

In garnering support for the schools it can be helpful to look at various segments, or groups, within the community.

Business Community. Major employers are important to the schools for a variety of reasons. They contribute significantly to the financial base for the schools, and their employees are major stakeholders in the success of the education enterprise. Businesses also can be tapped for volunteers and for other forms of tangible support for school programs. Schools need to make provisions for specific outreach to the business community in their comprehensive P.R. plan. The chamber of commerce can be a useful resource for coordinating such work.

Citizen Advisory Groups. Many districts develop a citizen advisory group as a sounding board on school matters ranging from controversial issues to new curricula. The value of such a board is heightened when it is carefully structured to represent the entire community. Some advisory groups are ongoing, but annual restructuring can keep them fresh and unbiased.

Parents. This is an obvious community group with a vested interest in the schools. But within the large group is a smaller group: parents new to the community. These parents deserve special attention because they will need to be oriented to the schools and their personnel, customs, services, and so on. Related to this group, of course, are simply parents whose children are first entering school. Although they may be familiar with the community, such parents may know little about the schools. They, too, merit special attention.

Grandparents. Often this group is keenly interested in schools. Many grandparents provide primary or secondary care for students when their parents are working. Much can be gained by helping grandparents to take an active role by volunteering in the schools or simply by being invited to visit a school on "Grandparents' Day." Directing a few "Happygrams" to grandparents also can be a useful involvement strategy.

Senior Citizens. Nonparent/grandparent retirees can be tapped for volunteer programs. Senior citizens also are conscientious voters who can be counted on to favor schools if their support is cultivated through effective communication and involvement.

Students. Schools must never forget that their students are also their "public." One of the most effective P.R. strategies known is to review with elementary school children what they have learned on a given day, so that when they get home they can answer that perennial question: "What did you learn today?"

Unformed Groups. Discussions about the schools, for good or ill, go on throughout the community — in

barber shops and beauty parlors, in bars, in real estate offices, everywhere. Such groups are unformed, but they should not be uninformed. Providing businesses with school newsletters can be an effective supplement to school news found in the community's public media.

If school people learn about the community and thoroughly understand the concerns and interests of its citizens, then they will better be able to address those concerns and interests.

Finally, a strategy that can be very helpful in conveying information about the schools to the community is the education fair. A "Know Your Schools" event that invites the public in, whether for a school open house or a larger, districtwide event, is a way to showcase education, teachers, and students. Such education fairs are time-consuming, hard work; but they can reap significant benefits.

Success Stories

This section is a wrap-up that describes five successful school public relations programs.

Modesto, California

The Stanislaus (Modesto, California) County Office of Education hit upon the idea of a yearly conference to inform the community and motivate residents to improve the lives of children.

After reviewing the needs of the school district, officials decided that a committe should be formed to assess the public's attitudes and explore ways to involve the community in education matters. Some 50 key community leaders met to discuss the concept of rallying the community around the needs of children. That led to the formation of a committee with representatives from target groups. The committee's role was to develop a community conference.

The marketing team from the committee consisted of representatives of education, television and print media, law enforcement, business, government, and the religious community. A number of mass communication vehicles were used: flyers, posters, brochures, edi-

torials, talk-radio interviews, radio and television public service announcements, and news releases.

The team also employed a number of more personalized communication strategies: presentations to small groups, meetings with the editorial boards of local and regional papers, and personal letters from people of influence. This became an "ambassador" program, with various committee members taking responsibility for making personal contacts throughout the community.

The result of this multifaceted P.R. approach was that about 500 community members, representative of the broad diversity of the county, attended the conference. Some 150 members of the Modesto Rotary, the perceived power brokers, attended a luncheon keynote address. The conference received extensive media coverage, including three editorials prior and one after, a front-page treatment, and coverage by network television and cable TV on the day of the conference.

More than 250 conference participants signed pledge cards to reach out to children by making a commitment to support education. A follow-up plan was developed to support the process of fulfilling the commitment as well as to collect and analyze countywide data on future school issues.

Atlanta, Georgia

New communications strategies were implemented to meet the needs of the Fulton County school system, which serves some 60,000 students in 60 schools. The system's Information and Community Relations (ICR)

Department was charged not only to do basic P.R. but also to generate financial and in-kind contributions in support of the schools. The ICR also worked to encourage parent and business involvement and advised the superintendent and the school board on key issues.

Fulton County's geographic, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity argued for a similar diversity of communication vehicles. Thus the ICR employed both qualitative and quantitative strategies to tap this diversity: communication audits, focus groups, informal feedback, school employee and community surveys, and evaluations of ICR-sponsored events. The ICR also reviewed marketing plans from other school districts.

From this information, the ICR developed — during its annual planning retreat — goals for P.R. that complemented the school board's goals. The plan included timelines across three years and specific strategies for reaching key audiences.

Communication vehicles were expanded in an effort to better reach the target audiences and to expand those audiences. For example, the ICR encouraged school district employees to submit articles to national journals and professional associations. As a result, the school system was featured in several prominent publications.

Working with a graphic designer, the ICR also created a new logo for the school system. Letterhead, business cards, and other materials were revised to include the new logo.

Another new communication vehicle was a monthly column from the school superintendent that began to appear in neighborhood weeklies with a combined cir-

culation of more than 100,000. ICR staff members also began to craft op-ed pieces for local print media. In similar fashion, the ICR also worked with the local cable television company to produce a quarterly show. And they also created a website on the Internet. A monthly "hit" report was generated to keep track of how many people "visited" the website's 320 pages.

The ICR also stepped up efforts to gain input by using evaluation forms at all special events and training sessions; by using annual readership surveys; by polling key communicators; and by creating a database to track articles that were published about the schools.

Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

The Broward County schools designed a series of Partnership Week activities to spotlight current support and identify new supporters for its school reform initiative.

Organizers had set about rebuilding public confidence by holding focus groups with various constituencies. Harnessing community support was considered critical to accomplishing the district's improvement goals. Eight major priorities were adopted by the school board and superintendent as a result of this feedback, including developing and expanding partnerships. To begin working on this objective, the superintendent formed a Partnerships Department (PD) as part of his overall school system reorganization.

PD was asked to develop a recognition program that emphasized the importance of community partnerships

to the school district's reform efforts and to encourage new partnerships. A series of events, all scheduled during a one-week period, were planned to spotlight the role of partnerships in school reform.

A broad-based committee was formed to develop the Partnership Week plans. The committee initially met to identify key audiences, events that would attract specific groups, and ways to fund each event. Several sponsorship presentations were made based on corporate interest in key events. As a result, a name sponsor was secured for each event and a signature sponsor was identified for the week and the recognition activity. A logo and color standards were developed to link all of the activities.

A master list on contacts was compiled by identifying key communicators in every constituent group. Target contacts participated by

- Developing special registration forms and promotional posters for a volunteer conference,
- Recruiting business and community leaders to make phone calls to area CEOs who were invited to be "principal for a day," and
- Contacting business and civic groups to participate in the culminating event, a parnership recognition program and awards dinner.

The Partnership Week proved highly successful. Participating business leaders requested a mid-year "reunion" and pledged to recruit others into the partnership with the schools. Of the 45 executives who took part in the week, 20 were new supporters; the other 25 intensified

their involvement. The recognition dinner raised $45,000 for school improvement, and media coverage was both positive and generous.

Vancouver, Washington

With interest in its staff recognition program declining, the Vancouver schools decided to ask the employees how the program could be improved. The staff recognition program had existed since 1981. Employees nominated their peers for special recognition in 12 categories. A committee recommended the winners, and the board of education made the final decision. Winners were honored at an annual awards program at a district high school. Over time nominations dwindled. A committee was formed to examine the program and revise it.

Their first step in revitalizing the program was to survey the district's 2,300 employees using the staff newsletter. Committee members also conducted interviews with central office personnel and school principals. Out of this they concluded that the nomination forms were too difficult to complete and the selection process was unfair (favoritism by board members influenced the selection of winners).

Radical changes were necessary. First, the committee created a new nomination form based on staff input. They made the selection process more democratic by ensuring representation on the selection committee from each type of employee group, and they vested the power to make final decisions in the selection committee itself, rather than the school board. Winners in each

employee category serve on the next year's selection committee.

The revitalization committee then went a step further and met with local business leaders to enlist their support for the recognition program. As a result, the largest motel and convention facility in Vancouver donated a room for the recognition event, and other businesses donated the refreshments.

Communication efforts also were stepped up — from broader distribution of nomination forms to better media attention. Thus the recognition event that had dropped to a mere 60 participants now draws more than 300. All employee categories are represented in the awards, and it is not unusual for the selection committee to receive 20 to 30 nominations in a given category. Finally, the Vancouver Rotary now honors a staff achievement award winner at each of its monthly meetings.

Rowland Heights, California

The Rowland Unified School District became concerned about two problems: declining enrollment and inaccurate media reports about school matters. To tackle these problems, the district developed a comprehensive marketing plan.

The Rowland schools offer a solid academic program, and the district boasts several California Distinguished Schools and a national Blue Ribbon School. But the schools' image had been tarnished by negative, often erroneous, media reports about crime and violence in the neighborhoods of the district. The implementation

of a choice plan and aggressive marketing by local private schools had contributed to a three-year decline in enrollments.

District officials concluded that a major effort was needed to redirect word-of-mouth about the district. The target audiences for the communications campaign were seen as:•parents (whether their children attended the district's schools or not) and local realtors and real estate developers. Attention was directed at elementary and intermediate school parents who would be sending their children to the district's high schools and, in particular, Chinese and Korean parents.

The marketing plan was activated in several ways:

- District officials trained supportive parents to be Parent Ambassadors to their peers. These individuals served as spokespersons for the district and gave presentations about the school throughout the community.
- The district developed key communicator groups to provide information to Chinese and Korean parents.
- The district hosted a breakfast meeting and school tours for realtors and real estate developers.
- District officials met with media representatives to gain support in placing positive stories about the academic program in various news outlets.
- The district mailed a marketing package to families in the area who had recently withdrawn their children from the public schools.
- District leaders took the time to pretest the marketing package with district parents to ensure that it was fully informative.

To date the marketing plan has resulting in significantly increased support. District leaders continue to receive positive comments; and the marketing package, now being reprinted, has been underwritten by a local developer. The Parent Ambassador program that began with eight parents has now tripled in size. Media coverage is now more balanced than ever. And, for the first time in three years, the district's enrollment has increased.

Resources

Useful Addresses

Educators interested in more resources on school public relations should become familiar with publications and services of the following associations and organizations:

American Association of School Administrators
1801 North Moore Street
Arlington, VA 22209
http://www.aasa.org

American Federation of Teachers
555 New Jersey Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20001
(202) 879-4400

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
1250 North Pitt Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-1453
http://www.ascd.org

The Education Commission of the States
707 17th Street, Suite 2700
Denver, CO 80202-3427
http://www.ecs.org

40

National Association of Elementary School Principals
1615 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
http://www.naesp.org

National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Drive
Reston, VA 22091
http://www.nassp.org

National Education Association
l201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036-3290
http://www.nea.org

National School Board Association
1680 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
http://www.nsba.org

National School Public Relations Association
15948 Derwood Rd.
Rockville, MD 20855
(301) 519-0496
Fax: (301) 519-0494
email: nspra@nspra.org
http://www.nspra.org

Phi Delta Kappa International
408 N. Union
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402
http://www.pdkintl.org

Print Resources

Bracey, Gerald W. "A Nation of Learners: Nostalgia and Amnesia." *Educational Leadership* 5 (February 1997): 53-57.

Brody, E.W. "Changing Roles and Requirements of Public Relations." *Public Relations Review* 11 (Winter 1985): 22-28.

Cappon, Rene J. Word. *The Associated Press Guide to News Writing*. Foster City, Calif.: IDG Books Worldwide, 1991.

Conroy, Charles P. "School Fund Raising and Public Relations: A Test for Administrators." *NASSP Bulletin* 68 (May 1984): 100-23.

Cottone, Laura, et al. "Public Relations Roles and Functions by Organization." *Public Relations Review* 11 (Winter 1985): 28-37.

Frohlichstein, Tripp. "Dealing Successfully with Media Inquiries." *NASSP Bulletin* 77 (October 1993): 82-88.

Goldstein, Norm, ed. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Guide*. Cambridge, Mass.: Perseus, 1998.

Lindermann, Walter K. Camp. "Selected Bibliography of Articles, Books, and Papers Relating to Research for Measuring and Evaluating Public Relations Effectiveness." *Public Relations Review* 14 (Winter 1997): 402-408.

Martinson, David L. "School Communication to Outside Publics: Truthfulness Must Be the Bottom Line." *NASSP Bulletin* 82 (January 1998): 81-88.

Martinson, David L. "School Public Relations: Do It Right or Don't Do It at All!" *Contemporary Education* 66 (Winter 1995): 82-85.

Ries, Eric. "Coping with Crisis." *Techniques* 72 (September 1997): 16-19.

Scherman, William H. "Retired Executives: The New Educational Consultants." *Educational Record* 66 (Summer 1985): 48-50.

Soholt, Sylvia. "Public Engagement: Lessons from the Front." *Educational Leadership* 56 (October 1998): 22-23.

Tacheny, Suzanne A. "Polls Are Useful: Yes, No, or Maybe." *Educational Leadership* 5 (February 1997): 49-51.

Wadsworth, Deborah. "The Public's View of Public Schools." *Educational Leadership* 5 (February 1997): 44-48.

Walker, Kim B. "Confrontational Media Training for Administrators: Performance and Practice." *Public Personnel Management* 19 (Winter 1990): 419-27.

Warner, Carolyn. *Promoting Your School: Going Beyond Public Relations*. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin, 1994.

West, Michael. "Effective Goal-Setting." *Campus Activities Programming* 3 (September 1993): 36, 38, 40.

Recent Books Published by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation

S.A.F.E. Handbook
Michael D. Rowland
Saddle-stitched paperback. $8 (PDK members, $6)
Special Offer: 10 copies for only $56

Planning for Disaster, Second Edition
Harmon A. Baldwin
Saddle-stitched paperback. $8 (PDK members, $6)
Special Offer: 10 copies for only $56

Inclusion: Policy and Practice
Thomas P. Lombardi, ed.
Trade paperback. $13 (PDK members, $9.75)

American Overseas Schools
Robert J. Simpson and Charles R. Duke, eds.
Trade paperback. $22 (PDK members, $16.50)

Getting a Job in Teaching
Joanne C. Wachter
Saddle-stitched paperback. $8 (PDK members, $6)

Use Order Form on Next Page
Or Phone 1-800-766-1156

A processing charge is added to all orders.
Prices are subject to change without notice.

Complete online catalog at http://www.pdkintl.org

Order Form

SHIP TO		
STREET		
CITY/STATE OR PROVINCE/ZIP OR POSTAL CODE		
DAYTIME PHONE NUMBER	PDK MEMBER ROLL NUMBER	

QUANTITY	*TITLE*	*PRICE*

ORDERS MUST INCLUDE PROCESSING CHARGE

Total Merchandise	*Processing Charge*
$3 to $25	$3
$25.01 to $100	$5
Over $100	5% of total

Special shipping available upon request.
Prices subject to change without notice.

SUBTOTAL	
Indiana residents add 5% Sales Tax	
PROCESSING CHARGE	
TOTAL	

☐ Payment Enclosed (check payable to Phi Delta Kappa International)

Bill my ☐ VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ American Express ☐ Discover

ACCT # _____ DATE _____

EXP DATE __/__ SIGNATURE _____

Mail or fax your order to: Phi Delta Kappa International,
P.O. Box 789, Bloomington, IN 47402-0789. USA
Fax: (812) 339-0018. Phone: (812) 339-1156

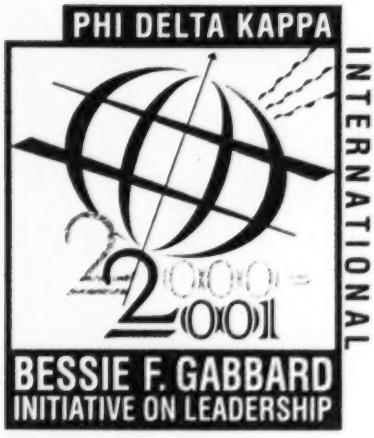
For fastest service, phone 1-800-766-1156 and use your credit card.

Phi Delta Kappa Fastbacks

This series, published each fall and spring, offers short treatments of a variety of topics in education. Each fastback is intended to be a focused, authoritative work on a subject of current interest to educators and other readers. Since the inception of the series in 1972, the fastbacks have proven valuable for individual and group professional development in schools and districts and as readings in undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation classes. More than 450 titles in the series have been published, and more than eight million copies have been disseminated worldwide.

For a current list of available fastbacks and other publications, please contact:

Phi Delta Kappa International
P.O. Box 789
Bloomington, IN 47402-0789 U.S.A.
1-800-766-1156
(812) 339-1156
http://www.pdkintl.org



Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership

The Bessie F. Gabbard Initiative on Leadership in Education for the 21st Century, dubbed the 2000-2001 Celebration for short, reaffirms the central importance of the Phi Delta Kappa tenet of leadership. Bessie F. Gabbard, the "First Lady" of PDK and a member and longtime chair of the board of governors of the Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, provided the impetus for this initiative, which will focus the energies of PDK members and staff during the two years of transition to the new millennium. During this 2000-2001 Celebration, special attention will be paid to leaders and leadership in education with a particular focus on PDK's traditional advocacy on behalf of the public schools.

ISBN 0-87367-664-5

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Hands-on science asks kindergartners to identify items that can be picked up by a magnet in this photo, circa 1953.

Courtesy of the Cleveland Public Library Photograph Collection.